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SUBJECT: LITHUANIA TIP UPDATE: JANUARY-JUNE 2005

REF: A. JUNE 2005 TIP REPORT: LITHUANIA COUNTRY NARRATIVE

[B](#). VILNIUS 306

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. The Government of Lithuania advanced its campaign against trafficking in persons during the first six months of 2005. Joint Lithuanian and British law enforcement efforts resulted in the breakup of a cross-border human trafficking chain that had sent women and girls to the UK. The Government approved a three-year program to combat human trafficking and prostitution. Parliament passed legislation that increased sentences for trafficking-related offenses, and Parliament is considering legislation that will bring Lithuania's laws on solicitation of prostitution into compliance with international norms. Lithuanian authorities completed their first extraditions of suspected traffickers. The U.S. Mission continues to emphasize TIP issues in our public events (including next week's Fourth of July reception at the Ambassador's Residence) and in our discussions with GOL principals. USG attention to trafficking issues has helped push reform. END SUMMARY

GOL AND UK COOPERATE TO STOP "SEX SLAVE EXPRESS"

[1](#)2. Lithuanian and British law enforcement agencies collaborated to bust a major human trafficking ring that had transported nearly 100 women to Great Britain from Lithuania. A two-year investigation led to the breakup of the trafficking ring that local media dubbed the "Sex Slave Express." All the victims of this ring were under 25, some juveniles.

[1](#)3. Police allege that a Lithuanian fashion designer, currently in custody, approached potential victims with promises of lucrative jobs in the fashion industry overseas. In total, nine Lithuanians from the northern-Lithuanian town of Siauliai allegedly participated in this ring. Lithuanian authorities have detained six and continue to pursue the others. Media reports portray the UK as a main destination for victims of trafficking.

TRAFFICKING ON THE RISE?

[1](#)4. Government and NGO officials agree that reporting of TIP cases is increasing, though they posit different explanations. Undersecretary Stanislovas Liutkevicius, who heads the Ministry of Interior's anti-TIP efforts, told the press that the number of cases had increased due to greater government efforts to combat trafficking. Audra Silpaviciene, director of the Lithuanian office of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and Ona Gustiene, Director of the Missing Persons Families Support Center in Vilnius, told us they believe that increased assistance to victims has led to a greater number of victims self-reporting.

[1](#)5. Silpaviciene and Gustiene also said there has been an increase in trafficking in persons following Lithuania's accession to the European Union. Mindaugas Petrauskas, Head of Lithuania's Europol unit, agrees and estimates that traffickers send up to 15 women and girls from Lithuania to the UK each month. Petrauskas said he believes trafficking in women from Lithuania appears to have intensified in the year since Lithuania's accession to the EU because of the easing in travel restrictions to member nations.

COMBATING TRAFFICKING - A GOL PRIORITY FOR 2005-2008

[1](#)6. The Government adopted a program for 2005-2008 to reduce human trafficking and prostitution. The plan calls for 6.2 million LTL (USD 2.2 million) in national, municipal, and NGO funds to support this program. Program goals include assessment of the extent of trafficking and prostitution in Lithuania, establishment of a support system for trafficking

victims, and allocation of resources to the new specialized police unit responsible for combating human trafficking. (Note: Creation of the unit responds to the recommendation of the U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons report.) Igoris Bazylevas, Lithuania's national coordinator for anti-TIP efforts, told us that the USG attention to TIP buttressed the GOL's efforts to increase its capacity to combat trafficking.

PARLIAMENTARY INITIATIVES

17. Parliament on June 23 adopted an amendment to the Criminal Code increasing the penalties for trafficking-related offenses. The legislation raised the maximum sentence for holding a person against her will using violence from eight to 10 years, and raised the maximum sentence for trafficking in children from eight to 12 years. The amendment prescribes the same penalties in cases of trafficking for the purpose of organ transplants.

18. The GOL in 2005 sent to Parliament a legal amendment to impose penalties on solicitors of sex services. (Currently only purveyors of sex services are subject to penalties under Lithuanian law.) The bill proposes a fine of 400 LTL for first-time customers of prostitutes; 750 LTL for repeat offenders. This legislation will also bring Lithuania into compliance with international norms by exempting victims of human trafficking from legal or administrative penalties. Bazylevas told us he expects that Parliament will adopt the amendment in July 2005.

19. Members of Parliament have taken a more pro-active approach in shaping the GOL's anti-TIP efforts. MPs Ona Valiukeviciute of the Human Rights Committee and Rima Baskiene of the Social Affairs Committee held a press conference June 18 to highlight the problem of trafficking in children. The MPs called for the Government to increase funding to Lithuanian NGOs working on anti-TIP programs. They also encouraged the GOL to focus more attention at the municipal level and in rural communities, working in particular with schools and families to increase awareness of trafficking issues.

FIRST EXTRADITION CASES

10. Lithuanian law enforcement officials in April executed their first extradition of a suspect on trafficking in persons charges, sending Costa Rican Mauricio Brenes Loaiza to his home country (ref A). In June, a Vilnius court granted a request to extradite a Lithuanian national whom German authorities plan to prosecute for trafficking women from Lithuania and Ukraine for prostitution in Germany.

U.S. Mission Efforts

11. Trafficking in persons continues to be a high mission priority and a theme on which we engage Lithuanians at all levels. The Ambassador recently raised the issue with Minister of Social Security and Labor Vilija Blinkeviciute, seeking her assistance in securing municipal approval to locate a USG-funded shelter for victims of trafficking (ref B). At the July 4 Independence Day celebration, the Ambassador will laud the efforts of two police investigators who brought down a UK-Lithuania trafficking ring. USG funds support an IOM project that promotes intra-governmental cooperation on trafficking issues and builds the institutional capacity of Lithuanian law enforcement. Mission support for local NGOs increases awareness of trafficking, especially at the local level and among at-risk populations, such as youth.

COMMENT

12. Lithuania is demonstrating serious commitment and leadership in battling what many experts perceive to be a growing problem of trafficking in persons. The nationwide anti-TIP strategy, in particular, is an important tool allowing the GOL to coordinate better its expanding efforts in this area. USG, NGO, and media interest has helped focus GOL policymakers on the need to address TIP issues. We will continue to encourage the GOL to push forward with its anti-trafficking efforts, focusing especially on increasing outreach to vulnerable groups that are the targets of traffickers and encouraging authorities to see that law enforcement has the resources it needs.

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